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WHA FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY VALENZUELA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/29/2020  
TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM CO HO  
SUBJECT: SANTOS MEETING AT HONDURAN INAUGURATION

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reason 1.4 (B and D)

¶1. (C/NOFORN) Summary: Assistant Secretary of State (A/S) for Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA) Arturo Valenzuela, Assistant Secretary of State for Economics, Energy and Business Affairs (EEB) Jose Fernandez, and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (PDAS) for Western Hemisphere Affairs Craig Kelly met with Colombian Vice-President Francisco Santos on January 26 in conjunction with the U.S. and Colombian attendance at the inauguration events for President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo. Vice President Santos told the U.S. delegation that the Government of Colombia (GOC) wanted to show its support for Honduras and the Lobo government in the wake of the election process. Santos said Colombia could draw from its own experience in confronting narco-trafficking and crime to assist Honduras' new government in addressing these challenges. WHA A/S Valenzuela thanked Colombia for its contributions to the Haiti relief effort. Santos responded that Colombia's commitment to the Haitian relief effort underscored Colombia's solidarity with its hemispheric neighbors and proved that Colombia can provide valuable expertise and assistance. WHA A/S Valenzuela highlighted the importance of bolstering electoral processes through strengthening institutions, which can only be viable if they are responsive to the people. Vice President Santos, who generally described the Colombian economy in positive terms, expressed concern about the adverse effect on the Colombian economy if the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is not ratified. WHA A/S Valenzuela responded that it would be difficult to achieve passage of an FTA in an election year, but that the U.S. would continue its efforts to do so. Santos also expressed concern that U.S. discussions with the Union of South American nations (UNASUR) would reopen the debate on Colombia's Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA); WHA A/S Valenzuela assured Santos that no meetings are currently planned and any future ones would be kept at a low level and would not endanger the DCA. End summary.

SUPPORT FOR THE NEW GOH

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¶2. (C/NOFORN) The U.S. delegation to the inauguration of President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo, which was led by WHA A/S Dr. Arturo Valenzuela and included EEB A/S Jose Fernandez, WHA PDAS Craig Kelly, Executive Assistant to the WHA A/S Juan Gonzalez, and Protocol Officer Tanya Turner, met at the Ambassador's Residence with the Colombian delegation, which was led by Colombian Vice-President Francisco Santos, and included Chief of Cabinet German Manga. The Ambassador and Colombian Ambassador to Honduras Sonia Marina Pereira Portilla also attended the meeting.

¶3. (C/NOFORN) Vice President Santos explained that the GOC very much wanted to show its support for Honduras and the new Lobo government. Vice President Santos had already visited Honduras after the November elections to congratulate the

then president-elect and the GOC had been quick to return Ambassador Sonia Marina Pereira Portilla to her post in Honduras. President Uribe himself had originally been scheduled to attend the inauguration, but had had to defer due to his commitments at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Instead, he would visit and pay his respects to the new President on Saturday, January 30.

¶4. (C/NOFORN) Vice President Santos described some of the economic and security challenges that Honduras faces and the ways in which Colombia could draw from its own experience in confronting narco-trafficking and crime, particularly kidnapping, to assist Honduras' new government in this time of transition. He said that Colombia had developed good capability in surmounting similar challenges and thought that his country could add value by contributing law enforcement and judicial training assistance to aid in Honduras' fight against crime and narco-trafficking.

#### LATIN AMERICA AND ISSUES OF DEMOCRACY

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¶5. (C/NOFORN) A/S Valenzuela thanked Colombia for its contributions to the Haiti relief effort. Vice President Santos said he was pleased that his government had been able to move quickly to make significant contributions, including sending a military field hospital, search-and-rescue and emergency-reaction teams to Haiti, as well as hundreds of tons of relief supplies. Vice President Santos said that Colombia's commitment to the Haitian relief effort underscored Colombia's solidarity with other nations in the hemisphere and had proven that Colombia has the ability to provide expertise and assistance that could be valuable to its neighbors.

¶6. (C/NOFORN) Vice President Santos discussed Jose Miguel Insulza's bid for re-election as President of the Organization of American States (OAS). Santos said that although Insulza had been targeted as being Chavez-friendly and a supporter of the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of the Americas (ALBA), Insulza had actually been helpful to Colombia and the Uribe administration. Vice President Santos revealed that Insulza had supported Uribe's democratic security strategy and been supportive in the process of disarming the right-wing paramilitary. Vice President Santos felt that Insulza had also been constructive in working with Colombia on strengthening democratic institutions and human rights. According to Santos, Colombia is inclined to support Insulza's bid for a second term.

¶7. (C/NOFORN) A/S Valenzuela highlighted the importance of democracy and the evolution of elections in Latin America in general, saying that there were lessons to be learned for all nations. He emphasized the critical importance of bolstering electoral processes through strengthening institutions, and highlighted that the only way for those institutions to be viable was by ensuring that they responded to the real wants and needs of the people. A/S Valenzuela stated that the key to consolidating democracy in Latin America was to ensure that institutions be transparent, responsive and relevant to political life. He observed that populists, in trying to forge direct connections between the leader and the people, weaken and eventually destroy democratic institutions. A/S Valenzuela criticized the notion that any one person is indispensable to the success of a country. He said that a good leader fortifies institutions so that he or she can depart office knowing that democratic processes and principles will continue to thrive. Vice President Santos joked that the message had hit its mark and that he understood Valenzuela's comments in reference to Colombia. A/S Valenzuela replied that his comments were not targeted at Colombia but were rather a comment about Latin America in general, and were equally true and applicable to the United States.

#### ECONOMICS AND TRADE

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¶8. (C/NOFORN) Vice President Santos inquired about the status of the U.S. Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and expressed concern that the lack of a ratified FTA would adversely affect the Colombian economy and investment in Colombia. A/S Valenzuela agreed that it would be difficult to get a clear vote on the FTA during an election year because of the sensitivity regarding trade issues in the U.S. However, he reassured Santos that the U.S. administration would continue to work towards approval and that he hoped there would be opportunities beyond the elections.

¶9. (C/NOFORN) Vice President Santos also conveyed the GOC's apprehension that U.S. discussions with the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) would result in reopening of the debate on Colombia's Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA). A/S Valenzuela responded that there are currently no meetings scheduled with UNASUR at this time and that any discussions in the future would happen at a low level and would not endanger the DCA.

¶10. (C/NOFORN) Vice President Santos discussed Colombia's economy in positive terms, stating that the GOC has recently uncovered huge deposits of oil and finds itself in a favorable situation in terms of electricity. Santos mentioned that Colombia exports significant amounts of electricity to Ecuador, which is currently facing a drought. Furthermore, he explained that the GOC is interested in situating itself to sell power to Caribbean countries, including the Dominican Republic and Haiti, by completing an underground/underwater pipeline network.

LLORENS